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ABSTRACT

One way of revitalizing the liberal arts in community colleges could be through the development of a career program in liberal arts for students planning to enter the work force as entry-level employees in positions that do not require specific vocational skills. The skills required for entry into many careers are those that are also the goals of a liberal arts education: the ability to communicate orally and in writing; the ability to think critically and to make reasonable decisions; a knowledge of the environment, contemporary culture, and social heritage; and the ability to get along well with supervisors and co-workers. The businesses for which these skills and abilities are important include travel agencies, real estate and insurance offices, banks, retail stores, and innumerable state and local governmental agencies. As many of the courses and instructional materials that would be necessary for a Work Experience Liberal Arts Program (WELAP) are already in existence, the development of the program would involve structuring the proper number of general education interdisciplinary courses, adding a cooperative work experience job placement component, and forming an advisory board to mentor the program and integrate career and academic experiences. Examples of existing programs possessing some of the features of the WELAP model are provided. (LAL)

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MERGING THE LIBERAL ARTS WITH WORK EXPERIENCES

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1047 Gayley Avenue, Suite 208
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BULLETIN

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Merging the Liberal Arts with Work Experiences

Career educators have known for years that occupational programs benefit from two special types of activities—one organizational, the other experiential. The programs include lay advisory committees who consult with the staff, and work experience for the students. Translating these two approaches to the liberal arts is one way of moving the positive aspects of occupational areas to other programs.

The design, development, and operation of lay advisory boards to the liberal arts were discussed in a previous issue of the **Bulletin** (#8, **Developing Lay Advisory Committees to the Liberal Arts**). Based on the notion of outside assistance, most occupational programs have lay groups to help them in program planning, providing job placement for students when feasible, and offering advice on curriculum and instruction and on new techniques in the field. While the notion of advisory boards to the liberal arts is relatively new, the concept has been profitably transported to these areas.

Similarly, cooperative work arrangements are a viable way of integrating college and work experiences. By linking theory and practice, these external connections to the college assist both students and faculty in a number of ways. The elements of such cooperative experiences could, we believe, also apply to the liberal arts. The rationale and scenario for such a Work Experience Liberal Arts Program (WELAP) is presented in this issue of the **Bulletin**.

The Work Experience Liberal Arts Program (WELAP)

In most community colleges the liberal arts are centered in the transfer program. Students who major in these academic areas usually intend transferring to a senior institution to complete a baccalaureate or higher degree. Frequently the liberal arts represent the general area of study and students are expected to major in one of the academic disciplines within the arts, humanities, sciences, or social sciences: literature, mathematics, history, etc.

In recent years most liberal arts programs in community colleges have taken different form, not because the instructors and curriculum managers have wanted them to be different but because the pattern of student attendance has shifted. Decreasing percentages of students are enrolled in the two-year colleges for the freshman and sophomore years of a baccalaureate degree curriculum. Most attend for career training, upgrading or connecting, or for their own personal interests. Where four-year colleges and universities are available, the community colleges draw few serious students of the liberal arts. Thus, the transfer program as the home of the liberal arts has become less a program, more a repository of unconnected courses. The science courses are often taught as service courses to the health occupations and the higher - level technologies. The humanities and social science courses are often oriented toward students' personal interests, and, in some cases, survive only because they fulfill general education requirements for students seeking associate degrees.

One way of revitalizing the liberal arts could be through the development of programs in which courses in humanities, sciences, social sciences, and communications are more than general education requirements or courses for the personal interest of adults, and other than discipline-based catchalls for students who are undecided about the choice of a career. This plan would be for a liberal arts major, retitled perhaps to differentiate it from the traditional transfer-oriented curriculum, but firmly grounded in the best concepts stemming from the liberal arts themselves.

The program would be designed for students planning to enter the work force as entry-level employees or trainees in a variety of businesses for which specific skills and licenses are not required upon entrance, where perhaps the businesses train their own employees. The skills that are required upon entry are those that are purportedly the goals of the liberal arts: the ability to communicate orally and in writing; the ability to think critically and make reasonable decisions; a knowledge of the environment; an appreciation for the contemporary culture; an understanding of the social heritage; and the tendency to understand and get along with supervisors and fellow employees.

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This latter characteristic is extremely important since the major determinant in an individual's success on the job generally appears to be not technical expertise but rather the ability to get along with other people. Those who are employed are generally competent in their technical skills. Whether their job is either fulfilling or fraught with difficulties, however, is usually a measure of their on-the-job relationships. Getting along with the supervisor, working effectively with colleagues, communicating with customers, are as difficult and as important variables as are the actual occupational skills in avoiding frustration and finding job fulfillment.

The businesses for which these skills and abilities are important include travel agencies, real estate brokerage and insurance offices, banks, retail shops, and innumerable municipal and state governmental agencies. A two-year work experience liberal arts degree would enable students to enter such offices as trainees, apprentices, and as employees who are prepared for a variety of options within the agency itself. What employer would not want a receptionist who understands people and the broader aspects of the community, and who could get along well and communicate with anyone who approaches the company?

Such a program as WELAP would not demand the creation of entire new courses. Indeed, interdisciplinary options in the humanities, sciences, social sciences, and communications areas already exist in many institutions. Where the courses themselves are not available, texts and various media-based programs are easily attainable. It would but remain to string together the proper number of preexisting liberal arts courses, to add a cooperative work experience job placement component, and then to form an advisory board to mentor the program and to actively integrate the positive aspects of career with academic experiences.

Putting together a career program in the liberal arts can be effected by a few selected instructors in the humanities, sciences, social sciences, and communications areas. One instructor, a chairperson, or an assistant dean would serve as program head. The group would select the courses required for the liberal arts program, make the appropriate arrrangements with local businesses for cooperative work experiences and eventual job placements, and promote the program within the institution and in the local secondary schools. It is important that

members of this group be identified with the program even though their academic affiliation would remain in their home departments. It is important also that the program have few if any options: the most successful curriculums are those in which certain courses are both required and followed in sequence. And it is important that in such areas as English composition, where there may be multiple sections of the same course, the liberal arts career students be blocked in the same sections; the variations in different sections of the same course should not be allowed to intrude on a structured program.

Students in this program should be encouraged to attend certain college-sponsored and community-related events as a group so that their sense of togetherness would be enhanced. And for this reason it is also important that a peer relation or buddy system be promoted. In other words, the WELAP program would be organized in such a way as to integrate student activities and encourage student interaction. It would function as a highly structured program with definite admission requirements, definite end goals, and definite commitment from instructors to help in career selection and placement.

The curriculum itself? It could center on the traditional general education interdisciplinary courses. However, if an institution has a course or two in philosophy, psychology, rhetoric, or, for that matter, any discipline in the liberal arts that would be useful for students to take, no need to go through the laborious process of generating new courses. It is more important to get the career-oriented liberal arts program established than it is to spend years developing just the perfect set of courses.

Probably our only caveat is that the courses should not focus too much on the personal, the "Who am I?" Society in general and curriculum in particular have already been hurt by an excessive focus on "Me." The popular literature is full of books centering on the individual: coping, diet, gaining advantage, looking out for the self. The students' attention should be turned more to the human condition, society, and civilization in general that rests on the interactions among people. Also, because technology is ubiquitous, any of the humanities, science, or social science courses that attend to the history, politics, ethics, sociology, and philosophy of science and technology should be given high priority. The students graduating from the Work Experience Liberal Arts Program should understand how the world works, the fundamental assumptions surrounding science and technology. Those who would be more than mechanics, those who would succeed in business, who want to rise on the career ladder, should understand these relationships.

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The success of such an integrated program is dependent on several factors—if it is promoted properly, if its instructors can show how cooperative work experience in small businesses can help student learning, and, especially, if the organizing group can show that jobs are available for people who have attended a program of this type. The chairperson, the faculty, and/or the counselors associated with the program must establish liaisons with community representatives; a lay advisory committee to the program is essential (see **Bulletin** #8). They must explain the program's operation and expected outcomes to secondary school staff members so that students graduating from high school may be properly directed to it. They must pursue all possible job leads in the small businesses and public agencies of their area so that they can point the students toward employment. And they must conduct follow-up studies of their graduates so that they have a ready supply of data on entry-level salaries, success ratios, and prospects for promotion.

A half-century ago the junior colleges were not remiss in promoting what they then called "terminal education." This was the era when the two-year colleges were seen as being responsible for providing a capstone education for people who would not go on to the baccalaureate. The Work Experience Liberal Arts Program (WELAP) would display much of the elements in the rationale and operation of the capstone programs of that era. Such a program represents more than an idea whose time has come; it is an idea that never should have been abandoned.

Existing Programs

El Camino College in California has executed such a merger in two separate programs. The Governmental Management Program, created in 1979, is geared both to area government employees who desire supervisory and managemental advancement and to those individuals who want occupational preparation for careers in local government. An advisory board, consisting of city managers and other local government officials, meets regularly with the faculty coordinators. Students may select one of two options—either a certificate of completion after taking five required courses or an Associate of Arts degree after completing seven governmental management courses together with other degree requirements.

El Camino also has instituted an analogous curriculum in Labor Studies. The program's first coordinators, the Educational Director of the United Auto Workers and El Camino's Vice President for Instruction, wanted to provide workers and

students with an economic, historical, and political understanding of organized labor. Here, too, an advisory group is central to the program's functioning.

In 1978 Los Angeles Trade Technical College established a similar but more extensive program in labor studies, a cooperative effort of the American Federation of Teachers College Guild and Los Angeles Community College District administrators. A full-time director supervises a full-time instructional assistant and a primarily part-time faculty, including several labor lawyers. Here, too, students may elect either a certificate of completion or the more comprehensive associate degree.

The extensive cooperative education program at Pima College (Arizona) involves several liberal arts instructors. These faculty members work directly with the cooperative education division for the express purpose of introducing courses in the liberal arts to students enrolled in occupational programs.

In all cases, the program would be geared to preparing students for careers in selected fields while it prepares them to adjust to changes in the work world.

Further Information

Some literature about liberal arts/career programs is available from the ERIC Clearinghouse for Junior Colleges at UCLA:

8118 Math Sciences Building,
University of California
Los Angeles, Calif. 90024

For example, a series of papers on liberal studies in career programs (ED 123999) points out that although the most practical kind of education that colleges can supply is a strong foundation in theory, one of the better ways of refining theoretical skills is through the mastery of a practical art, science, or skill. Another article (EJ 228441) argues that the liberal arts are valid for career-oriented students because they expand the scope of knowledge, maximize reasoning skills, and encourage lifelong learning.

Still one more approach is through a labor studies program that combines the social sciences, humanities, and communications. The purposes of this program are to provide a perspective on economic, social, and political problems; to provide educational opportunities for individual growth and advancement; and to equip members of labor organizations with the necessary skills to exercise their union and civic responsibilities (ED 164387). A court reporting curriculum (ED 162702) provides one more example of a program that combines theory and practice. Among its prescribed courses are office and communication skills, legal terminology, medical terminology, national and state government, and sociology.

On a more limited scale, Broome Community College (Binghamton, N.Y.) offers its liberal arts students an elective community internship course. Under the general supervision of a faculty member, who assigns background readings and runs discussion sessions, students are selected to work in a variety of areas that correspond to their career interests. Current placements include law offices, veterinary clinics, the local newspaper, and local governmental units. The internships vary in accordance with student interests and available placements.

A national study conducted by Kinnison and Probst (ED 173004) documented the fact that the traditional engineering school model of cooperative education does not work effectively for liberal arts students. The authors, who surveyed more than 450 liberal arts cooperative education programs, developed profiles of eight higher education institutions: The American University (Washington, D.C.), Antioch College (Yellow Springs, Ohio), which pioneered liberal arts cooperative education; Bennett College (Greensboro, North Carolina); Golden West College (Huntington Beach, California), LaGuardia Community College (New York); Montreat-Anderson College (North Carolina); Pasadena City College (California), and Wetherforce University (Ohio). This study provides specific guidelines for either two-year or four-year colleges that might want to initiate new programs or improve ones that are not as effective as they could be.

In concluding their report, Kinnison and Probst point out that:

> *Liberal arts cooperative education is a program for practicality. It is the finest form of career education because it provides the vitally needed element of effective career counseling. At the same time it includes the humanities studies which for so long shaped individuals by influencing their ideals and values. We note especially that all this is accomplished by an excellent optional liberal arts cooperative education program. Such a program would be of value to some students in almost every institution of higher education. The academic work can become more meaningful and students can acquire increased motivation for liberal arts studies.*
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> *(1979, p. 61)*

The WELAP program that we at the Center for the Study of Community Colleges are advocating might include some aspects of these examples. In all cases, the program would be geared to preparing students for careers in selected fields while it prepares them to adjust to changes in the work world. The students who emerge from such programs should be well prepared for their future life.

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